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Lessons from Cuba

It seems now, in the cold, clear light of reappraisal that anti-Castro forces, everywhere, both active and inactive, expected entirely too much from the recent Cuban invasion which ended in disaster for the invaders. Fidel Castro fought in the mountains for more than a year before he succeeded in overthrowing Dictator Fulgencio Batista, whose resistance lacked the weapons supplied to Castro by the Soviet Union.

American news media made much of the rebels' landing. The Soviet Union's propaganda experts seized upon the event to attack the United States in an attempt to lower this country's prestige abroad. Khrushchev blamed this country for encouraging the invasion, providing arms and facilities for training. To a certain extent, these are facts.

Yet in what ways did the anti-Castro rebels differ in their preparations from Castro's? Various groups in the United States, Mexico, Venezuela, and possibly other countries helped Castro and he set out from Mexico to battle the Batista forces. Virtually no mention of these things was made anywhere.

There was much surprise in the United States because the Cuban people did not rise up, join the rebel fighters and chase Castro from the island. It is reported that the Central Intelligence Agency advised President Kennedy badly on this and CIA, as a result, is the subject of an investigation.

Castro had been fighting in the mountains for more than a year before he developed the idea which was designed to attract mass support. This was his promise of agrarian reform—land for the landless,—and it had probably more to do in accomplishing Batista's downfall than any other single factor. There were no such rewards offered the Cuban people in the recent invasion.

Also, freedom in Cuba and freedom as Americans understand it are two different things. Americans value freedom above all else. The Cubans have had a long history of dictatorships. Consequently it is difficult for the masses of Cubans to evaluate freedom as we do. And, as far as anyone knows now the invasion forces made no real efforts to win over the Cubans to their side before they made their costly probe. In short, the invasion lacked sound ideas and muscle. However, as President Kennedy observed: "There are from this . . . useful lessons. . . . It is clear that the forces of Communism are not to be underestimated in Cuba or anywhere else in the world." The lessons learned from Cuba may come in handy in other areas where the United States is fighting to stave off Communism.